

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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NICK CARTER UNDER THE KNIFE OR THE LITTLE GIANT AMONG THE BODY-SNATCHERS



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
NICK CARTER

THE SKILLFUL PRACTITIONER INSERTED THE POINT OF HIS LANCET INTO NICK CARTER'S FLESH AND INSTANTLY LAID OPEN THE SPOT WHERE THE NEEDLE HAD BEEN INSERTED.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

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Nick Carter Under the Knife;

OR,

THE LITTLE GIANT AMONG THE BODY-SNATCHERS.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

"DEAD, SHE SHALL TOO BE MINE!"

"Nick, why don't you take a vacation? Business is not very rushing just now, and Patsy and I can attend to it as well as not."

The speaker was Chick, and he looked earnestly at his chief, as if to note the effect of his words.

The celebrated detective laid down his paper and turned toward his assistant with a little laugh.

"Vacation?" he replied. "Who ever heard of Nick Carter having a vacation, and besides, Chick, I should be as uneasy as a fish out of water every minute while I was away."

"But it would do you a sight of good," persisted Chick. "Just drop every care and thought of business and run up into the Adirondacks for a month; you will

come back refreshed and be all the more ready for work this fall."

Nick's only reply was a not very decided shake of the head, but Chick fancied that his chief might be even then contemplating a bright vision of life in the Adirondacks in the cloud of fragrant tobacco smoke that blew ceilingward.

The detective smoked on in silence, and Chick left him to his meditations. He had seen his chief scanning the timetables for several days with unusual interest, and he realized that Nick, like any overworked man, ought to have a period of rest.

Half an hour later Chick returned from the street.

He saw a look of satisfaction upon Nick's face, which spoke volumes in itself.

That look told the story.

New York's greatest detective was going to take a short rest.

"Chick," he said, as he rose from his chair. "I have not seen a day that I could really call my own for years, and I don't know just how I shall enjoy it. I am going up into the Saranac country, a locality that I knew well as a boy, and if anything should happen requiring me at any time, just wire me at Paul Smith's, Adirondacks."

"Good-by, and good luck," answered Chick, as he grasped the Little Giant's hand. "I certainly hope you will be more successful this time than you have been on other occasions when you have attempted to take a rest," and a moment later Nick left the "den."

Scarcely had the door closed behind him when the front door bell rang.

Presently Patsy appeared with a card which bore the name, "Mrs. Mortimer Hansell."

"A woman, eh?" mused Chick, and he gave the order to have Mrs. Hansell shown into the reception-room, and he quickly made a complete change in his appearance.

Disguised as a man of about fifty years, he descended to the first floor.

He paused for a moment to survey his caller through the peep-hole, and then he entered the room where she sat awaiting him.

Chick saw a woman of perhaps fifty-five years, whose face bore evidence of weeping.

Her eyes were red and swollen, and deep lines of sorrow were traced upon her forehead.

She had laid off her bonnet, and was

pressing her head between her hands as Chick entered.

"She is suffering from a violent attack of nervous headache," thought Chick, "and doubtless has a story to tell."

Instantly Mrs. Hansell rose.

"Are you Mr. Carter?" she asked.

Her voice trembled with emotion, and Chick invited her to resume her seat.

"That is my name, madame," was his quick reply, though he did not explain that he was Chick, not Nick Carter. "How can I serve you?"

Again the woman pressed her hands to her head, and, with an expression of pain, she replied:

"I have come to you for help. If you are at liberty you must give me your aid, or I shall certainly become insane."

"Please state your case, Mrs. Hansell," answered Chick, who was critically studying his caller. "If I can take it, I will do so."

"Oh, I am so thankful, and I know you will succeed. The body of my dead daughter was very mysteriously taken from our home last night, and I want you to undertake to unearth the criminals and discover where her body is."

Once again the suffering woman clasped her hands to her head, and Chick saw that she was nearly prostrated with grief.

"When did your daughter die?" he asked.

"Tuesday night; about eleven o'clock."

"And disappeared last night?"

"Yes, sir; or rather this morning."

"At what hour?"

"Between one and two o'clock."

"How are you positive about the time?"

"Because I visited the room where she

was laid out at one o'clock, as I had done every hour during the night, and when I again went in at two the casket was empty, and she was gone."

"Did you visit the room alone on each occasion?"

"No; a lady was 'watching' with me."

"She was already laid out, you say?"

"Yes, sir; in her casket, and the costume in which she was to have been married——"

"Ah, then she was engaged?" and Chick's face brightened.

"She was, but it is now over two years since her engagement."

"Indeed!" and the detective made a mental note of this fact. "To whom was she engaged, please?"

"A young medical student named Manuel Enella."

"A Spaniard?" and again Chick felt a deep sense of satisfaction.

"Engaged to a medical student, and her dead body stolen," he mused.

"I understand he is a native of Spain, and is a nobleman by birth," was the reply.

"He gave you to understand so?"

"Yes; and besides, his every bearing was that of a polished gentleman."

"That is characteristic indeed of the race," thought Chick, "and certainly not remarkable." Then aloud:

"And when did you last see your daughter's affianced husband, please?"

"Over two years ago."

Chick raised his eyes.

"Did I understand you?" he asked.

"It was two years ago last March that he went away," came the reply.

"Where did he go?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Where is he now?"

"That I cannot tell you; I have neither seen nor heard from him in any way in all that time."

"But, madame, there must have been something unusual to have caused his departure. Please tell me all."

"I will tell you everything that I know in connection with him, and trust that you may be able to solve the mystery, for, to me, it is dark as night."

"Proceed," answered Chick, while he mentally calculated that the woman in some way connected the mysterious disappearance of her daughter's body with the whereabouts of the man whom she had been engaged to marry.

"Three years ago my daughter met this man at a select dinner, and at once there arose a deep attachment between them.

"At first I was opposed to anything which might lead to an engagement, but after having met the man, and become thoroughly satisfied of his devotion, I no longer objected to his attention toward her, for Louise was then twenty-one years of age.

"Months passed, and the young people appeared to become more deeply attached than ever.

"My husband strenuously objected to Louise marrying, and thus time wore on until one year had passed, when one morning Louise came to me and told me that Mr. Enella had asked her to become his wife.

"I asked her what reply she had made to his proposal, and she raised her hand and showed me, upon her finger, a beau-

tiful gimmel ring, set with a magnificent solitaire.

"Nothing, however, was said to my husband about the engagement at that time, hoping that his pronounced dislike for Mr. Enella might become appeased.

"The marriage costume was made, and was both elaborate and expensive.

"Mr. Enella sent his wedding gift, a magnificent diamond necklace, and then we thought it time to speak to my husband about the proposed marriage.

"Both Louise and myself dreaded the ordeal, as we well knew that it would be a most trying one, but I felt that his wishes must be consulted.

"One evening I invited Mr. Enella to dinner.

"My husband appeared to be in an unusually happy mood, and Louise felt that perhaps her conquest would be far easier than she had anticipated.

"Dinner passed off without incident worthy of mention, and Mr. Hansell and our guest had engaged quite freely in conversation.

"Louise and myself were both waiting with some uneasiness for the moment when Mr. Enella should speak.

"It came at last.

"'Mr. Hansell,' he said, rising from his chair and standing where the light from the chandelier fell strongest upon him, I come to you to-night upon a solemn mission.

"'I have asked the consent of your charming daughter to approach you with my offer of marriage.

"'I love her, as she already knows, and without her, life would be miserable to me. She has assured me of her love in re-

turn, and now I come to you to ask for the most generous gift which lies in your power to bestow—your daughter Louise as my wife.'

"He had spoken rapidly, eloquently, earnestly.

"I glanced at my husband.

"Never shall I forget the look which appeared upon his face.

"An awful light filled his eyes, and his cheeks became deadly pale.

"For fully a minute he sat like one dumb. Not a muscle of his countenance moved, and the silence was almost unendurable.

"Then I saw a tremor flash through his body. His lips began to quiver and twitch.

"Louise rose and passed around the end of the table, pausing almost before her father.

"Then he spoke.

"In a voice which was cruel and stern, he denounced the Spaniard, and informed him that he should never grant him the hand of his daughter.

"Louise fell upon her knees, pleading, before him, while the object of his wrath gazed fixedly at my husband for a moment.

"Then he turned to me.

"'Mrs. Hansell, good-by,' he said, in a voice in which there was not the faintest trace of anger, then turning to my husband, he said:

"'Mr. Hansell, living, the hand of your daughter is pledged to me, dead, she shall, too, be mine.'

"The effect of his words was terrible.

"My husband rose quickly from his chair.

"His face was pale as he almost shouted, pointing toward the door:

" 'Dare ever again to darken my door, and your blood be upon your head. My daughter shall never be your wife while I live. Begone!'

"Manuel Enella turned away.

"The look which filled his eyes was even more terrible than that which appeared upon Mr. Hansell's face.

"One moment only he lingered, then, without a single word, he passed into the hall, the street door closed behind him, and he was gone."

CHAPTER II.

THE OPEN WINDOW.

"The case is an interesting one, madame. I will take it, but only under certain conditions."

"I am listening, sir."

"The fact that I am at work here must remain a secret between us."

"Granted, and you may be sure that I will aid you so far as lies in my power."

"Very well. Now I wish you to tell me, as nearly as possible, what were the garments in which your daughter's body was prepared for burial."

"She was laid out in her bridal costume——"

Chick looked up inquiringly.

"It was her dying request," spoke Mrs. Hansell, evidently comprehending his look.

"Was the diamond necklace and engagement ring also upon her person?"

"It was."

"That, too, by her request?"

"Yes, sir."

"Um! You heard no sound between

the hours of one and two that were unfamiliar?"

"None whatever."

"Were you in an adjoining room?"

"I was."

"In company with your friend who was also 'watching'?"

"We were together in the little parlor during the night, or at least, until we made the discovery that the body was gone."

"And you are positive that your companion heard no sound?"

"She told me that she did not see how any one could have entered that room and taken my daughter's body from the casket without making some noise that we could have heard."

"Was the door into this room open?"

"It was ajar."

"Did you immediately raise the alarm—as soon as you made the discovery?"

"No, sir. I could not believe at first that it was really true, and fearing lest the shock might completely overcome Mr. Hansell, we began a thorough search for some trace of the body or its whereabouts. I found an open window, which quickly told the tale. Whoever removed the body was evidently in too much haste to close the sash, and beyond that—nothing."

"Were any wraps or articles of wearing apparel taken?"

"Absolutely nothing so far as I could find."

"What was the general appearance of your daughter at the time of her death? Was she dark or light?"

"She was exactly of my own height, light-brown hair, which slightly curled at the temples, mild blue eyes and rather stout."

"Was there any peculiarity about her person by which one could identify her body?"

"I do not know that she had a mark or blemish upon her."

"Were her teeth perfect?"

"They were, and white as ivory."

"I think that will do for the present, Mrs. Hansell, and I will see what can be done."

So saying, Chick rose from his seat, but the woman hesitated.

The detective plainly saw that she had something further to say, and he waited.

Presently she spoke:

"Tell me, Mr. Carter, do you suspect that Mr. Enella is alive and has anything to do with the disappearance of my daughter's body?"

"Why do you ask that? Do you know anything about him whatever?"

"I do not, nor do I think Louise did, for I think she died of a broken heart."

"Then how could you even suspect him of complicity?"

"I do not suspect him, yet I cannot overcome the impression which his last words left upon me, 'Dead, she shall, too, be mine.' Do you think that has any bearing on the case?"

"Possibly, and yet it would be strange if some trace of her body cannot be discovered. When I see you again, perhaps I may be able to inform you on this point. For the present, return to your home, and say as little as possible about the matter. Was the funeral to have been private?"

"It was."

"Then you can ask your immediate friends to assist you in saying nothing whatever about the affair, and I trust by the day after to-morrow to have some news for you."

Again thanking Chick, Mrs. Hansell left the house.

"Well, my hand is in it pretty soon after Nick left, but I am not going to spoil his sport by puzzling him over the matter, so Patsy and myself will try and solve the mystery of the disappearance of Louise Hansell's body."

Thus musing, Chick went about a change in his disguise.

The Little Giant had already left the house, and Chick called Patsy to the "den."

"There is a new case on, Patsy," he said.

"The woman who called is in trouble, eh?"

"Yes."

"Murder?"

"No; her daughter died night before last, and last night the body disappeared from the house."

"Well, what do you want of me?"

"I am going out. Nick is out of town, and if any one calls, or any message comes from headquarters, you will say that I shall return soon."

"Very well."

Chick had carefully examined the New York city directory, but he could not find the name of the Spanish medical student enrolled.

He determined to visit the Hansell mansion, and learn, if possible, if any clew could be obtained, which might have escaped the mother's search.

Boarding an "L" train, the detective was not long in reaching the vicinity of the brown-stone front, and he quickly ascended the steps and rang the bell.

A servant responded to the summons, and to Chick's inquiry if Mrs. Hansell had returned, he received an affirmative reply.

He was shown into a magnificently furnished reception-room, and told that the lady would soon be down.

The first object of interest which fell be-

neath his eye, was a life-sized crayon portrait of an exquisitely beautiful young lady of about twenty years of age.

The face was symmetrical, the eyes seemed almost to kindle with merriment, and the lips were slightly parted as though their owner was about to speak.

While he was yet regarding the portrait, he heard a rustle of skirts close by, and turning, he stood face to face with Mrs. Hansell.

Apparently the lady did not recognize him, but the detective handed her his card.

Mrs. Hansell started.

"You are not the gentleman whom I left but a few moments ago?" she asked, in a tone of surprise.

"I am the same," he said, "but somewhat changed in personal appearance."

The woman looked incredulous, but Chick soon satisfied her upon that score.

"My friend, Mrs. Taylor, has made quite an important discovery since I left the house to call upon you," she began.

"A worsted afghan, which was in the room where my daughter's body was laid out, is gone."

"You are positive that it was in the room?"

"Indeed, I am. It had been there for a long time, and was certainly there last night."

Then, at the detective's request, she conducted him to the room where the empty casket still remained; just as the undertaker had placed it when the body of the unfortunate girl had been placed therein.

"This was the window which was open when we entered the room at two o'clock," she said, and Chick stepped forward to the window indicated.

"Were all the sashes securely fastened last night?" he asked.

"I am quite sure that they were."

The window in question opened upon a narrow veranda, and this in turn communicated with the rail of the front porch, thus forming an easy means of ingress to a person so inclined.

Chick examined the sash and fastening critically, and found that the lever of the catch moved with freedom, and raising or lowering the sash made but the slightest sound.

Each of the other two windows was tried in turn, but neither moved with the ease and silence of the one first tried.

No mark of violence was to be seen, and nothing in the room gave evidence of having been disturbed.

"One thing is absolutely certain," thought Chick. "Whoever opened that particular window knew which made the slightest sound, and in my opinion it was never opened from the outside."

CHAPTER III.

THE CORPSE BY EXPRESS.

Late in the afternoon Chick returned to the house.

A number of letters were awaiting him, and among them was one which bore a special delivery stamp, and was addressed to Chick in the familiar handwriting of his absent chief.

"Here's a letter from Nick," said Patsy, "which has not been delivered ten minutes. I had a good mind to open it, and should, if you hadn't showed up just as you did."

Chick took the envelope and saw that it bore the postmark, "Poughkeepsie, N. Y."

"I wonder what is in the wind now," he said. "Evidently Nick can't let business alone," and he broke the seal.

Presently the young detective's eyes dilated with pleasure as he read:

"Poughkeepsie, N. Y., Thursday, P. M.

"Dear Chick: An express box from the

city, which came on the same train with me, was dropped from the car to the platform by the expressmen here, and the box split from end to end.

"The body of a young woman of about twenty-five was disclosed, and the package is lying in the express office awaiting its owner.

"The corpse was evidently that of a consumptive, as the arms and face showed signs of her having died of a wasting disease.

"The hair was brown, and naturally quite wavy about the forehead.

"Her eyes were blue, and her hands and feet quite small. Nothing but a coarse sheet was wrapped about the body, and it was evidently sent to some resident physician, for dissection, as the address upon the cover is simply, 'Mr. John Brown, Poughkeepsie, N. Y.'

"The box will be kept until called for, and I have decided to wait here until I hear from you, thinking that there may be a sequel to the affair.

"You know where to address me here, and if I do not get a reply from you by to-morrow noon, I shall leave for the mountains. Yours, NICK."

Chick scratched his head.

Evidently fortune had favored Nick in revealing the contents of that box, and for a short time he fancied that he saw a quick solution of the mystery surrounding the disappearance of Louise Hansell's body.

"First to find who sent that box," he thought, "and then to telegraph Nick."

Chick snatched a hasty lunch, and set out at once for the general express office of the American Express Company.

The superintendent in charge had already left the office when he arrived, but an assistant was soon found who could give Chick the desired information.

"I want to learn," asked the detective, "if you can tell me at which of your branches a box was received to-day consigned to 'Mr. John Brown, Poughkeepsie, N. Y.'"

"Was it sent before noon?"

"Yes; on the 10:41 express."

The official turned to a large pile of shipping slips which showed the receipts for the various branch offices in the city, up to the noon hour.

But a careful examination of these check slips failed to show the record of any such box having been received by the American company.

"Do other companies do any business on that train?" asked Chick.

"Yes; both the Adams and the International," replied the clerk.

Chick tried the Adams without success, and then hurried to the general office of the International Company.

He found Manager Hopkins still there, and quickly made his wants known.

"Oh, you mean the box that was smashed at Poughkeepsie to-day?" asked Hopkins.

"Exactly. Have you heard from it?"

"Nothing special, only I was talking with our agent there about it, over the telephone."

"Had the box been called for or delivered?" questioned Chick.

"No. There is no John Brown in that city who would claim the box," was the reply.

"Where was it received?"

"At the Grand Central branch, up town."

"Who signed for it?"

"Wall, our day man there."

"Is he on duty now?"

"Yes; he goes on at ten in the morning and remains until ten at night."

Chick quickly left the central office, and took an "L" train for the Grand Central depot.

As the train flashed rapidly over the rails, the young detective sat meditating upon the various circumstances which surrounded the plot, almost developing into a clew from which he could unravel the mystery.

"Who is the third party in this game?" he thought. "It is perfectly plain to me that Enella is still alive, and I am convinced that he had something to do with the disappearance of Louise Hansell's body."

"I will strike him presently, and then I can get at the bottom facts, but I'll wager my reputation, and never guess again, if there isn't a dark secret somewhere that caused Mr. Hansell to object so strenuously to the marriage."

At the Grand Central, Chick had no difficulty in finding the express agent, Wall.

"Yes, I remember the box," replied Wall to Chick's question. "It was quite a box, weighing about a hundred and twenty-five pounds."

"Yes. Please describe the man who delivered the box."

"I am not very good at that, but he was about forty years old, I should think," was the express agent's reply.

"Dark?"

"Yes; very dark complexioned, black hair and mustache, coal-black eyes which seemed constantly turning from point to point. He wore a dark spring overcoat, black stiff hat and spectacles."

"Very good," replied Chick, enthusiastically. "Whose team brought the box?"

"I don't know. One of the men turned it in. Here, Bob!" to a man who was passing. "Whose team drove a man here this forenoon who sent that box to 'John Brown, Poughkeepsie,' that you commented upon?"

"I don't know. It was some hack driver. Hold on a minute," and "Bob" turned away.

He was gone about two minutes, then he came back accompanied by a hackman.

"I don't know just who brought the box, Wall," said the hack driver, "but when I came up on the other side 'Reddy' Taylor's hack stood near your platform, and I went

into the office for orders. When I came out 'Reddy' had gone, and one of your big teams was backing in."

"That was all the hack you saw?"

"On this side of the rail, yes."

"That's all right. Thanks," and the hackman turned away.

"Does that help you?" asked Wall of Chick.

"Possibly," answered the detective. "I'll try it and see. Do you know where this 'Reddy' Taylor stands?"

"I don't, but any of the drivers outside will know."

Chick thanked the busy express agent and left the office.

Across the street several carriages were standing, and the first man whom Chick questioned quickly directed him to the party whom he sought.

"Good-evening, 'Reddy,'" spoke Chick, as he approached the man.

"Hello," came the quick reply. "Ride?" and he stepped forward toward the carriage door.

"Yes, I'll ride, but I want to get up on the box with you."

"All right, just as you say," and soon the detective and his fare were a block away.

"You needn't go any farther just now, Taylor," spoke Chick. "I want to ask you a few questions first."

"Fire away," was the laconic reply. "What's your lay?"

"Do you want to earn a ten-spot dead easy?"

"Straight goods?"

"Yes."

"Dead sure now—no bluff. I'm not in for any crooked business, remember that."

"What do you mean by crooked business?" asked Chick, with a merry twinkle in his eye. "Evidently he suspects a mouse,

and I have got to play him foxey a little," he thought.

"Oh, I'm going straight now, I am, and they don't come any more money rackets on 'Reddy' Taylor; see?"

"Then you've been 'monkeyed with,' eh?"

"I have, and I'm done. If I can't earn a dollar honestly, then I don't stay on this box another day."

"Well, this is all straight, and I've got a good, clean ten here for you if you will answer two questions truthfully and squarely."

"And s'posen I don't answer 'em at all?"

"Then we'll perhaps 'monkey' a little."

"Who are you?"

"It don't matter, so long as you answer my questions."

"Let me feel of the long green."

"When you tell me just what I want to know."

"Give us your questions."

"Will you answer them honestly?"

"I will."

"Then who was the man that you brought here to the International Express this forenoon, who had a large box that he wanted to send?"

"I don't know who he was, but he told me that he was a student, and that the box contained a portion of his outfit."

For an instant Chick fancied that he was making rapid progress.

CHAPTER IV.

DR. PACIFICO, OF MADRID.

"Where did you get the box?"

"From a house on West Twenty-eighth street."

"What number?"

"Give me the ten spot; I've answered the two questions."

Chick quickly complied with the hackman's request.

"Now fire away," said Taylor, as he pocketed the bill.

"I'll tell you all I know about it."

"What was the number of the house where you got the box?"

"One hundred and thirty-five, I think, but I am not positive."

"Did you take it from the room, or was it outside?"

"It was on the front step when I arrived."

"Then he came for you to get the box?"

"The chap hailed me in the street."

"What did he say?"

"That he had a box that he wanted to send by express on the ten-forty train."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"Not that I know of."

"Can you describe him to me?"

"Reddy" Taylor quickly gave a description that tallied with that already given by Express Agent Wall.

"Now," said Chick, "drive me to West Twenty-eighth street."

"Keyrect!" and in a moment they were spinning rapidly down town, while Chick's mind was busy with the knotty problem.

They reached the house from which Taylor had taken the box, and Chick approached the door and rang.

A pleasant-featured woman responded to the summons.

"Do you have any lodgers?" asked the detective.

"No, sir, this is a private house," replied the woman, evidently mistaking Chick's meaning.

"Excuse me, but have you had no guest or roomer who is a student or something of the sort?"

"None whatever. You probably have the wrong number. But, stop! A man called this morning and asked me almost the same questions; said he was looking for a classmate who informed him that he roomed here."

"What kind of a looking man?"

"Well, he was very dark-complexioned, black hair and mustache——"

"About forty years old?"

"I should say so."

"That was he. What time did he call?"

"About nine o'clock."

"He had a box, did he not?"

"Yes, and he appeared very much disappointed at not finding his friend."

"Did he leave the box?"

"Only while he was gone for a carriage."

"Did you see who brought it?"

"I did not. When I answered the bell, he was at the door and the box was on the step."

"You did not know the man?"

"I never saw him before in my life."

"Whom did he inquire for?"

"John Brown; aren't you the man?"

Evidently Chick's last two questions had excited the woman's suspicions.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you," evasively replied Chick; "but if he calls again, just tell him I have been here."

"I will do so," and the detective turned away, while the woman stood watching until he had reached the hack.

Here was a poser.

The shrewd body-snatcher had neatly broken the trail which Chick had thus far followed with ease.

"I will telegraph Nick," he thought, "and then I must get down to solid work."

"Evidently the fellow was suspicious, and his appearance plainly shows guilt."

By Chick's direction, the hackman drove to Broadway, where the carriage was dismissed.

Then Chick entered a convenient telegraph office, and soon the following message was speeding over the wires to his chief:

"I have the case. Keep a sharp lookout until you leave, and let me know. Deep mystery. CHICK."

Presently the young detective started toward the Hansell residence, and had traveled about two blocks when he paused for an instant in a dark angle.

Chick's acute ears had caught a little shrill signal, which he instantly recognized as coming from Patsy.

The detective waited, and presently the "shadow" brushed past him, but in the act a crumpled wad of yellow paper was pressed into Chick's hand.

Then he continued on his way, while Patsy vanished much as he came.

"Nick has made some discovery," thought Chick, and when he reached a convenient spot, he carefully unfolded the telegram, which proved to be from his chief, and read:

"Poughkeepsie.

"Box claimed by a stranger, who came up on this train from the city. Will handle this end. NICK."

"Ah, then, my game is already playing into Nick's hands," thought the young detective. "Well, he probably has got my dispatch by this time, and he knows better how to handle the man there than I would to go up, so I'll just wait and see what he makes of it."

Chick knew full well that Nick would not drop the case until he had carefully probed it, now that he had already taken it up, and he resolved to return to the house and await developments.

Reasoning thus, he turned his footsteps toward Nick's home.

"I'll walk," he said. "The exercise will do me good."

Presently he crossed Fifth avenue, and entered a drug store, the proprietor of which he knew quite intimately.

"Good-evening," exclaimed the genial apothecary, after Chick had given him a wink by which the man quickly recognized him.

Chick accepted a cigar, and soon was in earnest conversation with the druggist.

Five minutes had passed when the door suddenly opened, and a small, wiry, nervous-looking individual entered the store.

"Good-evening, doctor," exclaimed the apothecary, and excusing himself to Chick, he turned toward the prescription case, behind which both he and the newcomer quickly disappeared.

For the period of five minutes the two men were conversing in low tones in the compounding-room, and then the man whom the druggist had addressed as "doctor" reappeared.

He was closely followed by the apothecary, who was speaking:

"If that don't do the business, I don't know what will, except I would try the battery."

"I'll try both as a last resort, but you know, Williams, I detest electricity."

"Yes; will you smoke?"

"I don't mind," and as the speaker advanced and took the proffered cigar, Chick felt a sudden thrill of interest, for upon the slim, tapering finger of the "doctor" appeared a beautiful gimmel ring, set with a single diamond of superior quality.

In a moment the "doctor" was gone.

Chick was curious to learn more about the man, for that gimmel ring had set him to thinking.

"A new face?" said the detective, in a casual way.

"Oh, he? Why, he is by no means new to me. Didn't you ever see him before?"

Chick acknowledged that he never had.

"Why, don't you know Dr. Pacifico, of East Forty-second street?"

"I am sure I do not. Is he an old resident?"

"Must have been there two years or more."

"Indeed. But then I suppose there are a

great many men that I do not know either professionally or in a social way. Does he have a good practice?"

"He seems to; sends me a great many prescriptions."

"Spaniard, eh?"

"Yes, he was born in Madrid."

"He appeared in a hurry to-night."

"Yes, he has a very difficult case on hand."

"You say the doctor has been located here about two years?"

"I should think so; yes."

"Do you know if he was ever in Philadelphia?"

"I do not think so. I have the impression that he received his education here."

"I fancied that I saw something familiar about him," and Chick's mind reverted to that gimmel ring.

"Perhaps you did," answered the druggist, and after a few moments, Chick took his departure.

Ten minutes later, having consulted a directory, the detective was on his way to Forty-second street.

His object was to survey the residence of the Spanish physician.

Somehow, Chick could not refrain from connecting the present Dr. Pacifico with the missing Manuel Enella.

The general appearance of the man gave the impression of taste and refinement, and that handsome solitaire ring, so odd in pattern, and so like the ring described as having belonged to Louise Hansell, gave Chick the impression that somewhere between this man and the missing body he was destined to find a connecting link.

He passed upon the opposite side of the street to the house which bore Dr. Pacifico's number.

A carriage stood at the curb, and evidently the physician was inside the house.

Presently the door opened, and the Spaniard himself hastened down the steps.

Chick heard him speak to some one who was sitting in the carriage, and a moment later the horse started away at a brisk trot.

While on his way to his patient, he evidently stopped at his office for something.

Chick would have been glad to have shadowed that carriage, but he plainly could not do so, as no other vehicle was in sight, and a moment later the doctor's turn-out disappeared in the direction of the river, and the detective turned to retrace his steps.

At that instant he became aware that he was being shadowed.

A dark form dodged into an area but a few feet away, but not so quickly that the keen eyes of the detective failed to observe it.

"Ah! Then there is to be something interesting in this game, is there?" and Chick quietly slipped the spring revolvers into his coat sleeves, and walked directly past the spot where he knew that an enemy lay secreted.

"I'll give him all the chance in the world to show his hand," thought Chick, and, with every sense on the alert, he passed the hiding-place of his foe, but no demonstration was made to show that any one was there.

Alert, active, and keen, the detective crossed the street, directly in the glare of an electric lamp. His ears were strained to catch the slightest sound, his eyes roved from side to side, and from point to point, scanning every nook and dark place of concealment for a possible foe.

"Well, I have eluded him," he muttered ten minutes later, and he started to mount the steps at Nick's home, little thinking of the thrilling experiences which Nick was passing through in following up the Poughkeepsie end of the case.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNFORTUNATE CALAMITY.

"Are you the man that I telephoned for?"

The speaker had just alighted from an express train at the depot of the N. Y. C. & H. R. R. R. at Poughkeepsie, and stepping quickly across the platform, addressed the hackman, who stood close by, with the above question.

"I am to drive a gentleman to Hyde Park," was the immediate reply.

"Good—very good!" ejaculated the stranger. "I shall be ready presently; I have a box in the express office which is to go."

Turning away, the speaker quickly approached the delivery window of the International Express.

"Is there a box here for 'Mr. John Brown?'" he asked.

"Yes, sir," came the reply, and the express agent eyed his interrogator sharply.

Evidently the man saw and comprehended the glance, for he spoke very abruptly:

"Isn't it prepaid?" he asked.

"It is."

"Then what are you looking at?"

"Are you John Brown?"

"That is my name," was the cool reply.

"You have a receipt from our New York agent for the box?" came the inquiry.

"Well, supposing I have not; what then?"

"You will have to be identified, that is all."

"Oh, very well, then, that is easy enough, but it so happens that I have the receipt," and the man quickly produced the voucher. "Isn't there an unusual amount of 'red tape' about this?" he inquired, half suspiciously.

"Well, no; but in this case we wish to settle for damages at once."

"How is that?" asked the stranger, in a tone of anxiety.

"The box was broken in transit——"

"What?"

"Yes; it was broken open by an employee of the company, and I have instructions to settle with you."

With a muttered curse, the man cast a startled glance around, but only the waiting hackman was close enough to have overheard the conversation which had passed between the two men.

"I'll attend to that later," was the reply. "I am already two hours late to keep an appointment, and I will waive my claim for damages if the contents of the box is all right."

"Will you receipt for it in good order?"

"Yes, and be spry about it, for I must be off," and again the man cast an anxious glance up and down the platform.

Standing just within the shadow of a friendly post, the hack driver heard every word of the foregoing conversation. He saw the look of anxiety which the stranger bestowed upon him.

A mysterious light filled his eyes for a moment, and a grim smile played about the corners of his mouth as he moved slowly away, while his fare was signing the express agent's receipt.

"I'll just wire a line," muttered the Jehu, under his breath, and an instant later he was at the office of the W. U. Telegraph Company.

He dashed off a short message, and marked it, across the margin, "Rush."

Passing the brief dispatch through the window with a half dollar, the seeming hackman turned away, but the operator picked up the telegram and began to count the words in order to return the proper change, when his eyes rested upon the signature, and he started and peered through the little wicket after the retreating form at the same time muttering:

"Nick! Why, that must be Nick Carter, and I thought all the time it was Bob Seeley, the hackman!"

The telegraph operator's words were indeed true, and the seeming hackman was none other than the celebrated detective in one of his clever disguises.

Nick reached the express-room just as his fare turned away from the window.

"My box is ready for you," spoke the man. "Now get into line as soon as possible," and leaving the detective to remove the shattered box, which contained the body of the unknown girl, he walked nervously up and down the platform, which was by this time nearly deserted.

Nick had no trouble in handling the box, for it had been thoroughly bound with a strong cord, before being delivered, by the express agent.

He soon had it firmly secured upon the rack of his vehicle, and then he addressed the stranger:

"All ready, sir," he said.

"Have you got that box where it won't get away from you?" came the inquiry, as the man approached.

"Oh, yes. That is all right now."

"Then don't let the grass grow under their feet," with a nod toward the horses, and the stranger, who had styled himself, "John Brown," sprang into the carriage.

The detective closed the door behind him and mounted the box.

Five minutes later they were rattling along the road to the northward, the carriage bounding from side to side as Nick urged his horses over the rough highway, which was at that time undergoing repairs.

"I wonder just what is in the wind," thought Nick.

"Is this man some fleeing criminal whom Chick is on the track of?"

"Perhaps he is a murderer who is making

a bold attempt to dispose of the body of his victim."

Nick smiled grimly as he thought of the surprise that was in store for his unsuspecting passenger.

Presently a voice from within the hack reached his ears:

"Hey, driver!"

Nick quickly drew rein.

"Is this a sample of the road to Hyde Park?" asked the mysterious passenger.

"Possibly it is somewhat better farther on," replied Nick.

"Confound it! I am just shaken to pieces in here," came the answer.

"Do you suppose I can ride outside with you? Wouldn't it be more comfortable?"

"There is room if you would like to try it."

The man opened the hack door and sprang to the ground.

"Anything would be preferable to that," he said, quickly clambering upon the seat beside the detective.

For nearly a mile they rattled along, the road seeming to be but slightly improved in condition as they advanced.

Once only Nick's companion spoke, and then to inquire if he would smoke.

"I left off some time ago," replied the Little Giant, at the same time thanking the man for his proffered hospitality.

The stranger quickly lighted a cigar, and by the momentary flash of the little match, Nick got a good view of his companion's face.

Dark-skinned, with a heavy coal-black mustache, and eyes that turned restlessly from side to side as the tiny flame lit up for a moment the visage of the suspect.

His slouch hat was pulled well down over his forehead, while his coat collar nearly covered the lower half of his face from view.

Nick Carter rarely made a mistake in

reading a criminal, and instantly he became determined not to lose sight of this individual, at any cost.

"If I haven't got a desperate blackleg here," he mused, "then I am no judge of criminals."

Onward, past beautiful cottages and thrifty homes, they passed, the stranger silent, and Nick thoughtful.

Now and then he urged the horses to a more speedy gait, as they were inclined to lag, but further than that the detective did not speak.

Suddenly the man by his side flicked the ashes nervously from his cigar, and turned to Nick.

"Do you know how to forget anything?" he asked.

"That depends," was the suggestive reply.

"Well, suppose you were approached by some one who wanted to know where you drove me to-night?"

The speaker paused, evidently to note the effect of his words upon his listener.

But Nick made no reply. He preferred to wait until his man had finished speaking.

"Could you forget where you went—provided—I made it an object to you?"

"I might."

"What is your price?"

"I'm not in the market," was the quick answer.

Evidently the man feared that he had offended, for he hastened to speak again.

At that instant, however, a bright light suddenly appeared around a curve in the highway, but a short distance before them, and the rumble of carriage wheels was distinctly heard approaching.

The powerful reflector of the carriage lamp fell squarely upon the Little Giant's face as the two vehicles drew nearer, and Nick reined adroitly to the right in order to pass the other.

He saw his companion glance sharply at his face, which was plainly revealed in the dazzling light, and at that instant an unforeseen calamity occurred.

The right forward wheel of the hack struck sharply against a granite boulder by the roadside, and with a sharp crack, the axle beneath him broke short off at the hub.

Instantly the hack lurched forward, and at the same moment the frightened horses sprang madly to the left as the unsupported corner of the vehicle dropped to the ground.

Nick felt himself plunging headforemost to the earth. He heard a cry of alarm from the occupants of the other carriage.

The reins were snatched from his grasp, in spite of his attempt to cling to them.

There came a crashing sound, a stunning shock, myriads of brilliant lights danced for an instant before his eyes, and with a shudder, the great detective lay quite still where he had fallen, while his thoroughly frightened horses dashed madly away into the night, bearing upon the driver's seat the mysterious passenger, and strapped upon the baggage rack the box which contained the dead body of his unknown victim.

CHAPTER VI.

"IS IT THE RESULT OF POISON?"

Scarcely two minutes had passed after the unfortunate accident upon the highway, when a dark figure hastened back along the road toward the spot where the unconscious detective still lay.

Reaching the spot, the searcher stooped and felt the pulse of the prostrate man-hunter.

"He still lives," whispered the newcomer, as he raised his head and cast a swift glance into the surrounding darkness. "Nick Carter, you played your part very shrewdly, but I hold trumps now. I knew you the moment that I got a good look at your face," and

continuing to mutter incoherently, the man bent once more over Nick's motionless form.

"I wonder where he is wounded," he said, half aloud. "If the blow will but do the work, it would save me the task, for he must—he shall die!"

A fearful look of hatred filled the wretch's eyes, and his face was contorted with murderous emotion as he uttered these words.

Then he suddenly started, and clasped his hand to his coat pocket.

"Ah! I have it!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of it before? The syringe, one little prick of the needle in his arm, the subtle poison is injected, and Nick Carter's fate will be forever sealed! Death due to the carriage accident will be the report, and I shall be free and safe from discovery."

Again glancing about him, as if to make sure that the darkness concealed no witness of the horrible crime which the body-snatcher contemplated, the wretch drew a tiny case from his pocket, and took therefrom a small hypodermic syringe and a little vial, containing a dark liquid, which he quickly uncorked and placed upon the ground beside him.

Rolling up the detective's sleeve, he dipped the needle-point of his syringe in the poison and instantly plunged it beneath the skin upon the Little Giant's forearm.

"There, Nick Carter, that will do the business. Now let them find you here, dead, by the roadside. The broken carriage wheel and the blow which knocked you insensible will tell the story of your death and I shall be safe."

Thus speaking, the poisoner walked away in the direction from which he had appeared, keeping well upon the grass by the roadside, in order to cover his tracks from possible discovery.

Five minutes had passed and the murderous villain had disappeared from the vicinity

of the crime when a carriage came bowling along the highway from the south.

"He told us the smashup occurred just here around this bend somewhere," spoke one of the occupants of the vehicle, and directing the driver to rein in his horses, he alighted and, lantern in hand, began a search for the spot where the accident occurred. Presently he started forward with a little cry.

"Here is the body of a man!" he exclaimed, as he held the lantern so that its rays fell upon the Little Giant's upturned face. Then he started back and a look of alarm spread over his face. "His head is cut," he cried, "and I guess he is badly injured, if not dead."

"Did he strike on that stone?" asked the second newcomer, as he approached the spot where the light revealed Nick's motionless form lying close beside a large boulder, against which he had apparently been thrown in his fall from the carriage.

A deep gash just above the right temple had opened the scalp to the bone, and the wound was bleeding profusely when the two men discovered his body.

"Yes, I should say so. See the hair on that edge of the rock," and the speaker stooped and plucked a tuft of hair from the jagged point near Nick's head.

"What had we best do?" asked one.

The second speaker stooped and placed his ear to the detective's breast, then he started erect.

"He is not dead!" he exclaimed, as a faint pulsation of the heart was audible.

"Then let's get him into the wagon and drive him to the hospital. Perhaps they may be able to pull him through."

Thus suiting the action to the word, the two men quickly lifted Nick's body into their vehicle and turned once more toward Poughkeepsie.

The distance to the city limits was covered as rapidly as the rough nature of the highway would permit, and then the horses were urged forward at a rapid pace until the Glen Park Hospital was reached.

The detective's body was quickly taken inside, and three of the most expert physicians closely examined the wound.

"It is a serious case," gravely reported the senior surgeon; "but we will do everything we can to restore him."

Then the two men who had remained until after the preliminary examination, gave the doctor in charge a full statement of the facts so far as they knew, and withdrew, leaving the unconscious detective upon the operating table, where two surgeons were busily engaged washing and dressing his wound.

Restoratives were applied which had been employed in similar cases many times before, and yet Nick Carter remained wholly unconscious of all that was transpiring about him.

The surgeons were puzzled at first that nothing could be found which would stimulate the action of the heart in the slightest degree, and when they saw their charge was slowly but surely sinking in spite of every effort upon their part to resuscitate him, they finally called the head surgeon of the hospital in counsel.

The gray-haired old surgeon listened intently to the report of his associates, and then he gravely shook his head.

"I fear you have neglected one very vital point, which may prove to be a serious obstacle in the way of recovery, and perhaps result fatally. That is, an examination of the body for evidence of foul play."

"But an examination has been made——"

"Um!" interrupted the old surgeon, as he bent over the silent and motionless form. "This is without doubt a case of suppressed restoration. The man would be sitting up

and talking with you now but for the presence of a powerful drug in his system."

"Is it the result of poison?" asked one.

"Yes," slowly answered the old doctor, as though he was endeavoring to recall something to memory. "This man has been operated upon by some one or has himself introduced some poison into his system."

"How are you so positive, doctor?" asked one of his listeners, and then they all started and looked earnestly at the body upon the table, as the reply came to their ears:

"Zounds! are you all getting color-blind? Look at the change in the color of his skin and the veins upon his wrist here at the pulse. Strip him at once and let us see if anything can be done for him."

Thus speaking, the aged surgeon threw off his coat and walked smartly up and down the room, while his fellows quickly relieved Nick's body of the greater part of his clothing.

The chief surgeon now approached the operating table.

Suddenly he stared and seized the detective's left arm, which lay in a natural position directly beneath the brilliant gas jet.

"Bring me my knives," he commanded, as he pointed to a tiny red spot upon the detective's forearm. "Do you see that discoloration?" he asked, in a hasty breath. "Well, let me tell you that the man has been poisoned by a hypodermic injection of a deadly character, and unless that poison is removed from his system at once, nothing can save him. This is the cause of your not getting any result from your attempts to restore him."

The surgeon took the case which contained his instruments and carefully selected a thin, keen-edged knife, while his companions critically examined the point where the needle had been inserted.

"Don't you think it may be morphine?" suggested one.

"Do you see any other scar on the arm showing that a syringe was ever used before?"

"I do not," was the quiet reply.

"Did you ever know of an opium fiend beginning the use of the drug in that way. And besides, he could never have introduced that needle himself, for don't you see by the direction in which it was pointed that another hand than his performed the task?"

In obedience to his directions, the younger surgeons held the detective's arm beneath a powerful glass which the old physician produced, and then, as though at work upon the human eye, the skillful practitioner inserted the point of his lancet into Nick Carter's flesh and instantly laid open the spot where the needle had been inserted.

Deftly he turned the tiny blade and drew the steel through the incision, and an instant later he removed a thin segment of skin and flesh which was plainly already affected by the subtle drug.

Then the surgeon brought out a powerful medical battery and quickly cauterized the wound, after which a number of stitches were taken.

"Now for an antidote," exclaimed the chief surgeon, as he rose from his task, but he had barely spoken the words when a footstep sounded close at hand, and the quartet of physicians turned to behold a stranger standing near the table, closely regarding them.

CHAPTER VII.

IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES.

At the office of the well-known undertaker, Beard, on upper Broadway, a caller stood knocking diligently at the door until he was answered by the proprietor of the shop himself.

"Are you the undertaker who was employed at the Hansell residence?"

The speaker was to all appearances a man of forty years, with keen, piercing eyes which flashed searchingly about as he opened the door and stepped into the office.

"I am, sir. What can I do for you?" was the reply, and the man arose and greeted his caller.

"May I speak with you in private?" with a significant glance at the two men who had been talking with the undertaker when he entered.

"Most certainly; this way—— Oh, don't hurry!" to his companions, who had risen as if to depart. "Wait a moment. I'll be at liberty directly."

But the two appeared determined to leave, and in a moment the undertaker and his caller were alone.

"Now, sir, what is it?" brusquely asked the funeral director, as he nervously fingered his watch chain.

"My business is strictly confidential——"

Mr. Beard interrupted with a nod, as if that story was by no means a new one to him.

"I wish to make a few inquiries concerning the body of Louise Hansell, whose funeral was to have taken place to-day."

"Who are you, if I may ask?"

"My name is Carter, and my business is that of a detective——"

"Nick Carter!" exclaimed the man. "Why, you are not the same Nick Carter that I met about a year ago!" and the speaker surveyed his caller from head to foot.

"Neither will I be the same again when you see me," grimly replied Chick—for it was he.

The disguised detective really enjoyed the little deception, and saw, with a feeling of deep satisfaction, that the very mention of his chief's name had caused an immediate

and complete change in the appearance of the dark-visaged individual before him.

The undertaker quickly tendered Chick a seat.

"Yes, I was called by Mrs. Hansell to attend to the funeral arrangements of her dead daughter, and by the way, isn't there something mighty queer about the disappearance of that body?"

"Then you are acquainted with the fact?"

"That the body had been stolen? Yes. I was probably the first outside of the family to know of the sad circumstance, and when Mrs. Hansell told me this morning, I advised her at once to employ you on the case."

"That's a smooth lie," mentally replied Chick, but, reserving his opinion, he thanked the genial undertaker for the compliment, and quickly asked:

"Have you the physician's certificate of death?"

"No. Both his certificate and my burial permit have been turned over to the authorities."

"Did you personally superintend the laying out of the body?"

"I did the work myself with the aid of a lady at the house," was the reply.

"What was the appearance of the body? Was the young lady very thin and much emaciated?"

"Yes; quite so. In fact, one would have readily seen that she died of a wasting disease."

"And what was the disease?"

"Heart failure and nervous derangement induced by mental trouble, I believe."

"Had *rigor mortis* set in when you were first called?" asked Chick.

"No; and even when I had placed the body in the casket there was no particular change in its appearance."

"You did not embalm it, then?"

"No, indeed, for it was wholly unnecessary," Undertaker Beard hastened to reply.

"When were you last there before the body disappeared?"

"I should say that I left the house about six o'clock last night."

"Immediately after you had prepared the body for burial, then?"

"Exactly."

"Were you there before during the day?"

"Once; quite early, and then not again until I took the casket to the house."

"Do you think it possible that the girl was poisoned?"

Chick fancied that he saw the undertaker start.

"Why, no. The idea never occurred to me," he exclaimed; but a strange shadow played for an instant about the corners of his eyes, and the next question staggered the man not a little.

"Do you know Dr. Pacifico of East Forty-second street?"

"I—I have seen him," hesitated the undertaker, "but the truth is, I know but little about him, and, in fact, I don't know that I want to," added Beard, with considerable warmth. "He is a mysterious individual, and nobody seems to know who he is or where he came from——"

"Good physician, isn't he?"

"Yes; I judge so."

"Has a first-class practice?"

"Well, fair, I guess."

"Um? Well, Mr. Beard, I thank you for the information," and Chick rose unceremoniously from his chair.

"Oh, don't mention it. If I can help you

further, command me," and the speaker followed Chick to the door.

"Very well, if I want any more information, I will call."

"By the way," asked the undertaker, "do you think this man Pacifico is in any way responsible for the sudden disappearance?"

Chick could not suppress a smile.

"I will wait, I guess, before I make my opinion public," and in a moment the young detective was gone.

"What an oily-tongued old scoundrel that 'whiskers' is," he mused. "He lied to me no less than four times to my certain knowledge, and I probably never will know how many more. I notice the fellow is somewhat like Dr. Pacifico in appearance."

It was but a short distance to the Hansell mansion, and, with what he fancied might prove to be a tangible clew in his mind, Chick turned his footsteps once more in the direction of the house.

It was yet early in the evening, and a light burned dimly in the front hall.

Chick advanced to the door and rang. He waited a moment and a servant appeared.

"Has the undertaker come yet?" asked Chick.

"No, sir. I have not seen him," quickly replied the girl.

"I am his assistant, and I will wait for him."

"Will you step in?"

"Thanks," and Chick entered.

"You are not the same assistant that he sent last evening, I see."

"No, indeed"—Chick was quick to take a cue—"he was too busy to come to-night,

and I don't have anything to do with his work."

"I shouldn't think you'd want to," was the quick reply.

"Why is that?"

"I don't believe he knows what his business is, judging from what I saw of him here."

Chick saw that the girl was particularly bright, and he felt somewhat elated over the success of his plan. He resolved to pump her for all she was worth, for now the detective knew that he had a clew to work upon.

"Why, didn't he appear gentlemanly?"

"Oh, yes, decidedly so; but you see it was like this: I helped the undertaker, Mr. Beard, to lay out the body, and was about the room a great deal, and when he had got the casket in readiness and was about to put the remains in, he stopped suddenly.

" 'I don't know whether there is any need of using any fluid,' he said. 'There doesn't seem to be much change, and I guess I will not do it.'"

"Then he went on with his work, and by and by he was done and ready to go.

" 'You can occasionally moisten the cloth in water,' he said, 'and lay it upon the face as I have done.'"

" 'About eight o'clock somebody rang, and I went to the door, and there stood the chap from the undertaker's.

"He said that Mr. Beard had gone away upon another case, and he had come to look at the body and see that everything was all right.

" 'Somehow, I didn't like to do it, but I let him in, and he went directly into the room.

"I went along, too, for I didn't know but he might want me for something.

"When he lifted the cloth from her face I saw him start. He turned to me, white as a sheet, and I didn't know what to make of it for a moment.

" 'Did Mr. Beard embalm the body?' he asked.

"I told him no, and that nothing had been used in the way of fluid whatever, excepting water.

" 'Will you get me a basin of fresh water?' he inquired.

"I turned and left the room. The water was in readiness in the lower end of the hall, for I had started toward the room to wet the cloth when the ring came at the door, so I did not have far to go.

"Evidently he expected me to have been out of the room much longer than I was, for when I returned with the water, I surprised him in the act of forcing a small vial between the tightly closed teeth.

"He hastily placed his hand in his pocket, and I saw him start.

" 'Did you get the water?' said he, as soon as he discovered me standing near.

"My answer was to place the basin of water within his reach.

"Then I stepped back and said:

" 'Mr. Beard told me when he left the house that there was no need of using any fluid, and I don't understand why you do.'"

" 'I know my business,' he said, in a half-angry tone, and upon that I left the room. A few moments later he went away, and I returned to the chamber and started to take out the water basin, when I found his

vial lying upon the stand, where he had apparently overlooked it."

"You have the vial yet?" asked Chick.

"Yes, and you had better take it back, for who knows what kind of poison it contains?"

"I will take it. Did you speak to Mrs. Hansell about the matter?"

"I did not. In the excitement attendant upon the mysterious disappearance of the body I forgot the circumstance until your coming reminded me of it."

"It may be just as well that you said nothing about it, for the grief-stricken mother has enough to trouble her now, and in reality it could do her no good to know of it."

"Perhaps not, and I really think that the mistress has not seen a real happy moment since the day she married Mr. Hansell."

Chick fancied that there was deep significance in those words, spoken as they were with the freedom often employed by servants in discussing the affairs of their masters.

With a sudden impulse, Chick asked the question the answer to which instantly changed the whole complexion of the mystery, and caused the young detective to utter a sharp exclamation of surprise.

"How long have Mr. and Mrs. Hansell been married?"

"About three years."

Chick was incredulous. Mrs. Hansell had not so much as intimated that Mortimer Hansell was not her first husband.

"Louise was then his step-daughter?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Her father is dead."

"Can I see Mrs. Hansell?"

"She is out, sir."

Once more Chick was nonplussed. Possibly she might have gone to call upon him.

"I will see the husband, anyhow," he thought, and turning to the girl, he expressed a wish to speak with Mr. Hansell himself.

The detective was not prepared for the reply which came to his inquiry.

"Mr. Hansell, too, is gone. He went away early in the day, and Mrs. Hansell became so anxious over his protracted absence that she went to try and find some trace of him."

"But I thought that he was in poor health."

"And so he is, but I think that he went to interview a detective concerning the disappearance of poor Louise's body, for in their conversation, just before he went away, I heard him speak the name of the celebrated detective, Nick Carter."

CHAPTER VIII.

DR. PACIFICO, ALIAS MANUEL ENELLA.

Chick left the house, after excusing himself to the servant by saying that he expected to have seen Mrs. Hansell, and he would return on the following morning.

"Here is a poser," he thought, as he descended the steps and walked hastily away in the direction of Dr. Pacifico's office.

"The undertaker, Beard, is without doubt playing an important part in this game, and if I am not mistaken, he knows more than he pretends.

"The matter of the undertaker's assistant visiting the house is possibly a part of the plot. Evidently that party was none other

than Dr. Manuel Enella-Pacifico in a very clever disguise.

"There is a dark plot beneath all this strange exterior, and I am determined to fathom it.

"I wonder if Mr. Hansell or his wife have been to see me. I'll just find out," and stepping into a drug store, Chick begged the use of the telephone for a moment.

"Any one been to see me?" he called, as he recognized Patsy's voice at the opposite end of the line.

"Yes; the lady who came this morning was here, and wants very much to see you. She left for home fifteen minutes ago," came the reply.

"Nobody else, then?"

"No."

"All right; so long."

Chick hung up the 'phone, and once more started for Dr. Pacifico's house.

"Now to find out just what this young doctor's case is, and then spring the trap, for, that he is the missing Enella, and can tell me what became of Louise Hausell's body, I am very positive."

Chick reached the house which he had seen the doctor leave earlier in the morning, and had raised his hand to pull the bell-knob when he heard the sound of carriage wheels approaching.

"That is the doctor's rig," he thought, as the vehicle rattled along the street at a merry pace, and Chick recalled the fact that the horse over-reached at about every third or fourth step, making a loud click as the toe calk of his hind shoe struck the forward wheel.

Instantly the detective had determined upon a bold plan.

Taking his picklock from his pocket, he inserted it in the keyhole, and an instant later he was standing in the front hall.

A door to the right bore the legend:

DR. E. E. PACIFICO.

Again the picklock came into play, and once more he was successful.

Closing the door behind him, Chick crossed the room.

He heard the quick step of the 'doctor' at the front door, and realized that he must act speedily if he would secrete himself.

Chick had barely crowded behind a sofa which stood at an angle across the corner of the room, when the doctor opened the door and entered.

Quickly lighting his lamp, Dr. Pacifico placed a large package upon a chair.

For a moment he stood and gazed fixedly at a picture which stood upon an easel in one corner of the room, and then he burst out suddenly:

"What shall I do?" he exclaimed, as a look of sadness and care filled his eyes. "Shall I step out boldly and tell the truth, make my statement to the world and get rid of this awful suspense, or shall I fly the country and leave everything save her behind?"

Then he paused as though attempting to decide upon his future course of action.

"But my work has not been entirely in vain. I have something to console myself upon, for now she is mine; all mine, and I defy the world to wrest her from me.

"Perhaps I do wrong that I do not go to her sorrowing mother and tell her all, but

until now I could not feel satisfied to do so.

"I wonder if she does not suspect the truth. Certainly she must think strange of that vial if I did leave it in the room and she found it.

"Why was I so careless?"

The man paced restlessly up and down the room.

"Confound that maid!" he exclaimed. "But for her sudden return, all would have been well, but as it was, I forced too much of the fluid into her system.

"Twenty drops or half a teaspoonful at most would do far better than what I did use. If I but had that vial, I would leave the sad memories of these two years of hermitage behind me, and hasten to Madrid, where I could be happy with my beloved."

Then the young doctor turned to the package which he had brought into the room.

"Shall I conceal these tell-tale garments?" he mused.

"Should a detective find them in my possession, the evidence would be complete."

For a moment the man stood irresolute, and then he turned with sudden energy.

"I will do it!" he muttered. "Then I will go to Mrs. Hansell and tell her how I have been living here within a rifle shot of her home for two years and under an assumed name I have watched over my loved one, hoping that at last fortune would favor me. I swore when I left that house two years ago, that, living or dead, Louise Hansell should be mine, and I have kept my oath."

The disguised Manuel Enella now stood revealed in his own character, and with his

self-accusing words he lifted the package from the chair.

"Where to put them now, that they will be safe——"

"I can attend to that," spoke a voice at his elbow, and as he whirled like a flash to confront the intruder, a hand was laid heavily upon his shoulder, and his eyes rested upon the detective, who was calmly regarding him.

"Who are you, sir?" demanded the young doctor, as a shade of pallor spread over his face. "Take your hand from my arm immediately!"

"Not so fast, my friend," was the chilling response. "I want you."

"You are an officer?"

"You need not guess again."

"On what charge do you arrest me?"

"Open that package," sternly commanded Chick.

The Spaniard looked the detective squarely in the eye, and his fingers twitched nervously as he slowly replied:

"I will not open that package at your command!"

"Manuel Enella!" and Chick's tone was terrible in its stern intensity. The man started with a slight gasp, and gazed at his captor.

"You may do as you wish, but by refusing to comply with my request, you take the consequences. I know what the parcel contains."

A flush of crimson diffused itself over Enella's face.

"Are you a wizard?" he asked.

Evidently Chick divined his thoughts.

"Yes, perhaps. You were indeed correct

in thinking that the costume which that package contains would weave a chain of evidence about you, if it were found in your possession."

Manuel Enella was strangely calm and collected. He drew his form to its full height, and his voice was slightly sarcastic as he spoke:

"I have committed no crime. You have made a mistake, sir."

"Indeed? It is my intention to give you an opportunity to prove that. Will you now open the package?"

"Yes, sir—inasmuch as you have ceased to command."

In a moment the paper was unfolded, and as Chick had surmised, it contained the bridal costume and diamond necklace which had disappeared with Louise Hansell's body.

"Now, where is Louise?"

Chick felt that he knew without putting that question, but he resolved to put Enella to a test.

The detective had reasoned out an entirely different hypothesis of the case than had at first seemed apparent, and it was upon this theory that he was now at work.

A smile lit up the face of the Spaniard.

"You think to learn from me?" he replied.

"Tell me, then, what has become of Mr. Hansell."

Instantly the young physician started. A dark frown clouded his brow, and his eyes flashed with livid sparks of hatred.

"Is he, too, gone?" he asked.

"Yes, and perhaps you can give me a clue to his whereabouts."

"When did he disappear?"

Chick realized that this question was but natural.

"Come, you have nothing further to conceal," said the detective, as he realized that he was upon the right trail at last. "Mrs. Hansell awaits me. You will accompany me to the house."

For a brief moment Enella stood irresolute, and then his face lit up with a look of determination.

"Yes, I will go with you, and I will tell you both my story."

The two men left the house, Chick bearing in his hand the package which contained Louise Hansell's wedding costume.

On the way to the Hansell home Chick related the circumstances surrounding his discovery of the vial and his subsequent entrance of the doctor's room in Forty-second street.

"How did you identify me with the missing Manuel Enella?" asked the young doctor.

"By that gimmal ring which you had on your finger when I saw you in the Fifth avenue drug store early in the evening," was Chick's reply, as the two men ascended the steps and rang the bell of the Hansell residence.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

"Gentlemen, I have that antidote here."

Thus speaking, the stranger who had so suddenly confronted the surgeons in the Poughkeepsie hospital stepped quickly to the unconscious detective's side, at the same time drawing a little vial from his pocket.

"Hold on, sir. Who are you and how did you gain admittance to this room?" and the speaker glanced toward the door which had been locked to prevent intrusion.

Chick, for it was he, did not stop to enter into any details concerning his seemingly strange appearance, for he realized that every moment might be precious if he would save the life of his chief.

He handed over his card, showing his badge at the same time.

"Are you indeed Chickering Carter?"

"Yes, and that man upon the table is my chief——"

"Nick Carter!" exclaimed the trio in a breath. "You have come none too soon to save him."

"Then be quick with a spoon."

The desired utensil was instantly produced, and Chick raised the vial and carefully counted twenty drops of its contents into the receptacle.

Gently raising the Little Giant's head, Chick pressed open the detective's jaws and placed the antidote well back upon the roots of his tongue.

Then he stepped back and permitted the three doctors to approach and watch the effects of the subtle drug.

It was a battle between a deadly poison, which had already got a tenacious grip upon its victim, and the powerful antidote, of which Chick well knew the value, backed up by an iron constitution—a grim struggle between life and death.

Several minutes of uncertainty elapsed before the old surgeon looked up with a hopeful start.

"He lives!" cried the old man, and in-

stantly a fervent "Thank God! I was not too late!" burst from Chick's lips, and there was a faint suspicion of moisture in his eyes.

"No, you came in the nick of time," was the quick reply. "The poison is overcome, and he will certainly recover."

Chick now for the first time felt the Little Giant's pulse, and the faint but regular beating of the heart was perfectly apparent.

"How did you chance to find him here?" asked one of the surgeons.

"I came to Poughkeepsie in part to find him, and partially to look up another person, and at the depot I learned of the telegraph operator, whom we both know intimately, that Nick had left the depot with a hack and fare in the disguise of the hackman whom I soon found at the stable, who told me that he had received a telephone message from New York to meet the train and drive a passenger to Hyde Park.

"But the owner of the team was all broken up, for he had just received word from parties near Hyde Park that the carriage was demolished, and the horses had been found by the roadside minus driver and fare.

"He had sent a man to look after his interests, and I procured a horse and started out also to find what had become of Nick and his passenger, for this was the very man whom I wanted.

"I had my powerful bull's-eye, and I held it so that the light fell upon the roadside, hoping to discover if possible where the accident, if any, occurred.

"When I had covered about half the distance to Hyde Park, I suddenly came upon the spot where the hack had broken down.

"The wheel lay in the grass by the roadside, and the ground was torn up where the axle and horses' feet had gouged out the bunches of turf.

"Stopping the horse, I began a systematic search in the grass and weeds, and I discovered that the axle had broken near the right forward wheel, and I quickly realized that this would throw the driver from the box.

"Nick had been the driver, and I feared that he might have been seriously wounded, if not killed outright, and when, a moment later, I came upon a dark stain of blood close beside a rough boulder, I knew that my fears had not been groundless.

"But Nick's body was not there, and in order to find what had become of it I began a very careful search of the ground about the spot.

"Suddenly I saw a shining object in the grass. Stooping, I picked it up, and judge of my surprise when I discovered it to be a tiny hypodermic syringe.

"To add to the horror of the situation, I knew that Nick's passenger upon the coach was a poisoner and a villain of the deepest dye, who had in charge at the moment that the accident occurred the body of a woman in a box upon the vehicle.

"I realized that in all probability the wretch had identified Nick and hastened to employ his deadly drug to rid himself of the detective by giving him a hypodermic injection while he lay there unconscious by the roadside.

"That Nick Carter was not dead when he administered that poison I felt reasonably sure. But the body was gone.

"I must find it, and in order to save him

I knew that I had no time to spare, and I felt positive that I had the antidote for that poison.

"By a careful search in the grass, I found where some one had approached the spot on foot, keeping well upon the roadside, from the direction of Hyde Park, and then I found where the same individual had returned in the direction taken by the runaway span.

"I knew that he had passed up the road the second time over it, because in one place his footprint going from the body nearly obliterated that made when he came toward it.

"Near the spot where the body had lain I found where a carriage had been recently turned about in the highway, and several tracks, evidently made by two men, neither of which closely resembled the first that I had found, plainly told me that Nick had been lifted into a carriage.

"As I realized that the carriage had returned toward the city, I thought at once of the hospital, and after having carefully thought the matter over, I fixed upon this as being the most likely to have been the one selected, and I came here in hot haste."

At that instant the Little Giant moved his arm as though to ward off a blow.

They all watched with deep interest the return of the detective's senses, and when, a few moments later, Nick opened his eyes, he found himself gazing into the face of his faithful assistant.

"What is it, Chick?" he faintly articulated, and then his returning memory seemed to recall the trip to Hyde Park, the mysterious body in the packing box, the dark

stranger who accompanied him, and then the accident.

"The hack, on the road to Hyde Park. What of it, and my fare?" he asked.

"Don't worry about that, Nick," replied Chick, in a reassuring tone. "Everything will come out right in the end."

"Have you found him and the box?"

"No, but I can do so inside of an hour."

"Was he the man you wanted?"

"Yes, and he is a bad one, too."

"Who is he?"

"He has been for years the leader of a band of body snatchers who make their headquarters in and near New York."

"Whose was the body that came in the box addressed to 'Mr. John Brown?'"

"That was the body of a girl who disappeared two days ago from her home in Fordham, and who was found dead in the streets of New York."

"Where did this man get the body?"

"From a certain undertaker named Beard, on upper Broadway——"

"I know him," interrupted Nick. "I have suspected all along that he was crooked. This man procured the body of the undertaker, who sent it to Poughkeepsie in order to throw you off the track of a still darker crime."

CHAPTER X.

THE FINAL ROUND-UP.

Seated within a dimly lighted room in a house not far from the village of Hyde Park were four men.

They were conversing in earnest tones, and were evidently much excited, judging by the nervous manner in which they cast

occasional glances at the heavily curtained windows and the door, which was securely barred upon the inner side.

"How did he get onto you, Beard?" one was asking, as he turned toward the Broadway undertaker, who comprised one of the party.

"Well, it is perfectly plain to me that some one knows more than you suspect."

"And that some one informed Nick Carter?"

"Evidently, yes."

"But I don't understand it at all," replied the man who had addressed Beard with a shake of his head. "I don't understand it."

"You say that you know that the man who drove you from the station was Nick Carter in disguise?"

"It certainly was. You don't suppose that I have been fighting shy of Nick Carter all these years without knowing the man, do you?"

"Well, no; but it puzzles me that this same Nick Carter could have been in New York and here at the same time. He certainly came into my office and introduced himself to me this evening."

"I know that he never will come into your office again, for I settled his accounts to-night forever."

"You did? Well, put up your hands, every mother's son of you, or I'll let candle light through you in a second!"

Every one of the quartet of precious villains turned like a flash, and four hands went to as many hips, but not a weapon was drawn, for the sharp click, click of two revolvers broke upon the air.

Standing at one side of the room, with his cocked revolvers leveled at the heads of the wretched band, was the form of Chick, his body erect and his eyes flashing with determination, as he spoke:

"Don't try any monkey business here, Mortimer Hansell," he said, in a warning tone, as he saw a look of sudden desperation appear upon the body-snatcher chieftain's face. "I arrest you for the poisoning of your step-daughter, Louise Hansell, and also Nick Carter, the detective, and complicity in the crime of body-snatching."

For a moment the accused villain remained silent, his face ashen pale, and his body trembling with excitement; then he raised his eyes until they met the detective's steady gaze.

"I will surrender," he calmly said, "but I shall never be tried by a court of law. My judgment will come from a higher tribunal."

Chick smiled grimly at these words, but he was by no means taken off his guard at the apparent submission of the wretch.

"Mr. Beard, you can do the needful," he said, as with a dexterous movement, Chick tossed a pair of handcuffs at the undertaker's feet. "Put those irons upon Mr. Hansell's wrists. He might be inclined to do something desperate."

"And that is just what I am going to do," exclaimed Hansell, as, with a sudden motion of his hand, the desperate man snatched a tiny vial from his pocket and raised it to his lips.

But the act was not quick enough to accomplish his purpose, and the poisoner was foiled in the attempt to take his own life by the quick action of the invincible detective.

Crack!

Chick's revolver spoke with a spiteful snap, and the little vial was shattered by the flying bullet sent by his unerring aim.

Instantly the interior of that room presented a strange scene, for every man of the party excepting the poisoner dropped upon his knees and lifted his hands high above his head.

It was but the work of a moment for Chick to handcuff the four men.

In an adjoining room, which communicated with the basement of the house, was found the express box, and its ghastly contents, still undisturbed.

Upon a south-bound train, which left Poughkeepsie early on the following morning, were six passengers who commanded more than ordinary attention.

Occupying two seats which were turned facing each other, were the four body-snatchers whom Chick had so successfully run to earth, and seated directly across the aisle, was the Little Giant and his famous assistant.

The quartet of villains were securely manacled together, for Nick Carter had learned that precaution often saves much trouble in handling desperadoes.

Chick was engaged in detailing to his chief the circumstances which led to his discovery of the real criminal and the subsequent unearthing of the body-snatching band.

"I appreciated that there was a deep mystery somewhere in the opposition which Hansell manifested to the marriage of the Spanish student to his daughter, and when I

made the discovery that Mrs. Hansell had been married to the man only about one year when Enella appeared, I at once came to the conclusion that Hansell was himself in love with his step-daughter, and that his denial of her hand to the young medical student was prompted by the jealousy with the thought that she loved Enella.

"I came to the conclusion that the body of the missing girl had never been removed from the house by persons who had forced an entrance from the outside, for there were no signs of violence upon the window, and it had plainly been opened by some person within the room.

"Hansell had not entered the room during the evening, for he had not passed through the adjoining apartment where his wife and an acquaintance were sitting.

"Then, when I learned of the mysterious visit of the pseudo undertaker's assistant and his use of a drug, the thought of poisoning instantly entered my mind, and I quickly identified the visitor with the Spanish medical student, whom I had discovered to be none other than Dr. Pacifico.

"This man, I reasoned, had an object in thus employing a drug upon the supposed dead body of his beloved, and I at once came to the conclusion that the drug was some antidote for a poison.

"In this case Pacifico could hardly have been the poisoner. Who then had administered the fatal dose but the step-father of the unfortunate girl.

"Instantly I saw through the whole plot. Hansell had poisoned the girl rather than have her fall into the arms of his rival.

"Louise Hansell had recovered sufficiently

to slip quietly from the house, and, without disturbing any one, she flew at once to her lover for protection.

"My theory was greatly strengthened by the discovery that Hansell had left the house as soon as he learned that you had been employed upon the case. I went to Dr. Pacifico's rooms and confronted him with the facts.

"He denied nothing, but quickly agreed to accompany me to Mrs. Hansell's home, where he stated that Louise had told him of many circumstances which led him to believe that Hansell was infatuated with his step-daughter, and, fearing that the man might resort to extreme measures rather than have Louise some day become his wife, Enella watched over his betrothed with jealous care.

"One day he chanced to meet Hansell face to face upon the street, and on the following day news came to his ears of the death of his beloved.

"The doctor resolved to know the truth, and went directly to the Hansell home.

"Once admitted to the house, he soon gained an entrance to the room in which the supposed dead body lay.

"As he stooped over the casket and gazed into the pale, upturned face, he suddenly realized that a strange odor came to his nostrils; barely perceptible, yet, to his trained senses, as unmistakable as though it completely saturated the atmosphere of the room.

"The shrewd physician instantly recognized the drug, and baring the poisoned woman's arm, he found where a needle had been plunged beneath the skin.

"Hastening to his laboratory, he procured

the antidote which he attempted to use when discovered by the servant who took him to be the undertaker's assistant.

"In his haste to avoid detection, Enella forced too large a dose between her lips, and the action of the remedy was retarded for several hours owing to this mishap.

"Enella took Louise to the hospital as soon as she staggered to his apartments, where he worked over her all day long, barely saving her life by his untiring efforts, and now the suffering girl is safe in her own home once again under her mother's care, and as soon as she has sufficiently recovered she will marry the man whose skill and undying devotion saved her from such a terrible fate.

"For a time I was puzzled over the dark-complexioned stranger whose description tallied so closely with that of Dr. Pacifico himself, but after I had met Undertaker Beard, I was convinced that from his striking resemblance to the Spaniard arose the confusion of identities.

"Circumstances had for a time led me to believe that Manuel Enella was a rascal, but the doctor gave me the cue to the body of the young woman in the box, which he had seen delivered at the express office by the undertaker himself, as he was driving past earlier in the day."

Mortimer Hansell kept a bold front until he was taken into his wife's presence and learned the truth, when he broke down completely and confessed his numerous crimes. The plotters had been foiled in their desperate attempts to take Louise Hansell's life, and now the body-snatchers are serving long terms in the penitentiary in expiation of

their crimes, and the country is well rid of a desperate band of men, but Nick Carter will ever carry a scar to remind him of their villainous leader, Mortimer Hansell.

THE END.

The next number will contain "Nick Carter and the Forest Fires; or, A Nest of Vipers Burned Out."

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